

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 17022

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, TH

SUBJ: WATANA KEOVIMOL

REF: STATE 212876

SUMMARY: WATANA KEOVIMOL LEFT THAILAND IN 1963 AND HAS RESIDED IN THE UNITED STATES SINCE THEN. HIS THAI FRIENDS ASSOCIATION IS AN UNINFLUENTIAL ORGANIZATION IN TERMS OF THE THAI STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES. LT. GEN. SAIYUD KERDPHOL TOLD US HE MET WATANA ONCE. SAIYUD CHARACTERIZED HIM AS AN AGGRESSIVE, AMBITIOUS OPPORTUNIST. DURING THIS MEETING, WATANA GAVE THE HARDLY CREDIBLE CLAIM OF BEING THE MOVING FORCE BEHIND THE THAI STUDENT MOVEMENT IN THE U.S. WATANA PHONED SAIYUD TWICE DURING THE RECENT DISTURBANCES FOR A BRIEFING.

END SUMMARY.

1. WATANA KEOVIMOL WAS BORN ON 11 SEPTEMBER 1944 IN SARABURI PROVINCE, 200 KILOMETERS NORTH OF BANGKOK. HE ENTERED THE U.S. ON A STUDENT VISA IN 1963 AND REPORTEDLY HAS TRIED TO ADJUST HIS STATUS. HE HOLDS DEGREES FROM BAKERSFIELD COLLEGE (A.A.), SACRAMENTO STATE (B.A. 1969) AND SETON HALL (M.A. 1970). HE WAS A REPORTEDLY DOCTORAL CANDIDATE AT NEW YORK UNIVERSITY IN 1972. HIS LATEST PRESS RELEASE IDENTIFIES HIM AS A DOCTORAL CANDIDATE AT RUTGERS UNIVERSITY.

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2. MOST OF THOSE FAMILIAR WITH THAI STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS IN THE U.S. HAVE NOT HEARD OF THE THAI FRIENDS ASSOCIATION (TFA). THOSE WHO HAVE DESCRIBE IT AS A SMALL, FRINGE GROUP THAT HAS LITTLE INFLUENCE ON THAI STUDENTS. THE PRIMARY STUDENT GROUP IN THE U.S. IS THE THAI STUDENTS ASSOCIATION. A PERSON CLOSELY CONNECTED TO THE NATIONAL STUDENT CENTER OF THAILAND (NSCT), HOWEVER, REMEMBERS RECEIVING A PUBLICATION FROM THE TFA. IN ANALYZING TFA INFLUENCE, IT SHOULD BE BORNE IN MIND THAT OF BONA FIDE AND QUASI THAI STUDENTS IN THE U.S. THE MAJORITY (SOME 15,000) ARE IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA AND NOT ON THE EAST COAST WHERE WATANA IS HEADQUARTERED.

3. SOURCES CLOSE TO THE THAI STUDENT MOVEMENT POINT OUT THAT WHILE THAI STUDENTS IN THE U.S. WOULD OBVIOUSLY BE INTERESTED IN EVENTS IN THAILAND, THAI STUDENTS OVERSEAS HAVE LITTLE IF ANY INFLUENCE ON WHAT GOES ON HERE. IN FACT, THE NSCT IS REPORTEDLY CONSIDERING A PROPOSAL TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATIONS BY BRINGING OVERSEAS STUDENTS UNDER ITS UMBRELLA. COMMENT: RETURNING STUDENTS CAN CARRY THE GERM OF POLITICAL ACTIVISM, BUT IT IS UNLIKELY THAT OVERSEAS STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS HAVE DIRECTLY INFLUENCED IN-COUNTRY STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS SUCH AS THE NSCT. THE THANOM GOVERNMENT, HOWEVER, WAS CONCERNED ABOUT THE POTENTIAL FOR CROSS FERTILIZATION AND TRIED TO KEEP AN EYE ON OVERSEAS STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS. WHETHER HE REFLECTED PARANOIA OR REALITY, FORMER DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER PRAPHAT CHARUSATHIEN CLAIMED THAT AMONG THE EVIDENCE INCRIMINATING THE 13 EARLY CONSTITUTION PAMPHLETEERS WAS PROOF THAT THEY WERE IN CONTACT WITH OVERSEAS GROUPS.

4. LT. GEN. SAIYUD KERDPHOL, ROYAL THAI ARMY DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF, TOLD US THAT HE MET WATANA LAST AUGUST WHILE TOURING THE U.S. HE SAID THAT WATANA PRESENTED HIMSELF AS A LEADER OF THE THAI STUDENTS IN THE U.S. AND SAID THAT HIS TFA ORGANIZATION WAS THE MOVING FORCE IN THAI STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS. SAIYUD DESCRIBED WATANA AS AN AMBITIOUS, AGGRESSIVE YOUNG MAN. SAIYUD SAID THAT ALTHOUGH WATANA WAS INTELLIGENT, HE "TALKS WHEN HE SHOULD BE LISTENING." SAIYUD SAID THAT WATANA HAD A PROPENSITY FOR NAME DROPPING. HE MENTIONED THAT WATANA PHONED HIM LONG DISTANCE ON OCTOBER 14 AND 15, AND EXTENSIVELY QUESTIONED HIM ABOUT EVENTS IN THAILAND.
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COMMENT: WATANA'S PROBABLE RELIANCE ON WIRE SERVICE REPORTS, AND HIS PHONE CONVERSATIONS WITH SAIYUD DURING WHICH SAIYUD COULD HARDLY HAVE BEEN FULLY CANDID, WOULD ACCOUNT FOR THE SIGNIFICANT INACCURACIES IN THE "BRIEFING PAPERS" FORWARDED TO US.

5. CONCLUSION: WATANA'S DELUSIONS OF GRANDEUR INCLUDE A RECENT PRESS CONFERENCE WHERE HE ANNOUNCED THAT HE WILL

RETURN TO THAILAND AND ESTABLISH A POLITICAL PARTY. ALTHOUGH
WE WISH HIM LUCK, HE SEEMS TO BE HIGHLY EXAGGERATING HIS TIES,
INFLUENCE AND PERHAPS HIS ORGANIZATIONAL ABILITIES.
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